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SUBJECT: SPAIN'S VIEWS IN ADVANCE OF FEBRUARY GAERC

Classified By: ADCM William H. Duncan for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Poloff discussed anticipated agenda items for the February 23-24 GAERC with MFA European Correspondent Maria Luisa Benitez-Donoso February 20. In addition to the topics below, Benitez-Donoso said that there will be statements made regarding Iraq's democratic elections and the current situation in Sri Lanka, calling for humanitarian aid.

¶2. (C) Afghanistan: Benitez-Donoso shared that the GOS welcomes President Obama's directed review of our Afghanistan and Pakistan strategies and agreed that the August 2009 presidential election will be crucial. She could not confirm whether Spain will send military reinforcements for the elections, but highlighted Spain's commitment of 1.5 million euros for election funding as a strong sign of commitment in the region. Benitez-Donoso opined that internal reconstruction is key and that reconciliation of all factions of the Afghani government is fundamental. She said that Spain also considers development in neighboring countries to be important to Afghanistan's reconstruction, referring to Spain's interest in joining the Friends of Pakistan group. With respect to EUPOL and whether the mission will be fully staffed, Benitez-Donoso intimated that the cost of the mission is at issue. She congratulated the U.S. on the appointment of Ambassador Holbrooke and said that Spain hopes for close coordination between Holbrooke and EU Special Representative Sequi.

¶3. (C) Gaza: The Gaza discussion will focus on two themes, according to Benitez-Donoso. First, continued discussion of the latest developments in the Gaza conflict. For Spain, reconstruction, reconciliation amongst the Palestinian political authorities, and sustained re-opening of crossing points is key. Benitez-Donoso said that Spain did not yet have a figure for an additional pledge at the March 2 Donors Conference in Sharm al-Sheikh, but pointed out that Spain has, since the beginning of the crisis, contributed 6.5 million euros in aid. Secondly, the ministers will discuss the recent elections. She said Spain hopes for "openness" in the wake of the Israeli elections and will cooperate with the new Israeli administration as soon as a coalition government is formed.

¶4. (C) Sudan: Benitez-Donoso said that Sudan will be fully discussed in March, but that Spain agrees with most U.S. points on this topic, specifically the need for a unified message denouncing violence against humanitarian aid workers or UNAMID in response to an arrest warrant and encouraging the GOS to participate in the peace process led by UN/AU mediator Bassole.

¶5. (C) Western Balkans: Benitez-Donoso said that recent reports on Serbia's progress have been "very positive." With respect to the EU plan for engaging Belgrade going further, she said that the plan is still under debate as some countries have reservations. Speaking to the High Representative/EU Special Representative nominees to succeed Lajcak in Bosnia, Benitez-Donoso said that in principle,

Spain is not opposed to supporting the UK candidate, but is still considering all candidates.
CHACON